

HOW TO... Create a floorplan

Cliff Joseph shows you how to use the cover disc software to design your own room – and win £500 of John Lewis vouchers to make that dream room a reality



FLOORPLAN 9



Computer Shopper is giving one reader the chance to win £500 of John Lewis vouchers. All you have to do is install FloorPlan 9 from this month's cover disc, load our sample room and dress it any way you like.

To give you a head start, our two-page 'How To...' will take you through all the basics of designing a room, adding furniture and using the different views to lay it out effectively. There's a huge library of ready-made objects including chairs, tables and sofas, so you should be able to come up with stunning designs with very little effort, although you're free to add your own objects, too. Our only stipulation is that the default room's dimensions cannot be altered.

When you're ready to submit your final design, choose 'Save as' from the File menu, type your full name as the filename and click Save. Send the saved file as an attachment to competitions@computershopper.co.uk. We can accept only one application per person, entries must be submitted by 15th November 2007 and our expert panel of judges will pick the winning design. For full instructions, click on the FloorPlan 9 link from the cover disc browser.

If you're not going to enter our competition or you find that designing the room has given you the redecorating bug, FloorPlan 9 has plenty more to offer for all DIY projects. Our guide takes you through drawing scale models of the rooms in your home, creating blueprints and designs and even costing a job. Before you start decorating, let FloorPlan 9 help you out.

1 When you launch FloorPlan 3D for the first time, you will see an empty workspace. There are quite a few icons and tools spread around the workspace, but the process of creating a floorplan is actually quite simple. The icons that run along the top of the workspace represent different types of objects that you can use in your plans, such as walls, doors, tables and other items of furniture. The panel running down the left of the screen provides more detailed information about each type of item – showing different types of tables, for example, such as dining tables or coffee tables. It also includes a 3D graphical preview of each item so you can see what it looks like before you add it to your floorplan. Before you go any further, you should quickly use the standard Save command (File, Save or click on the Save icon) to name your floorplan and save it to your hard disk.

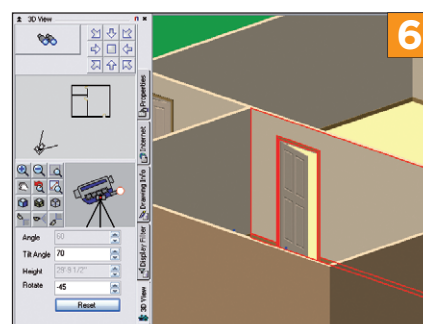
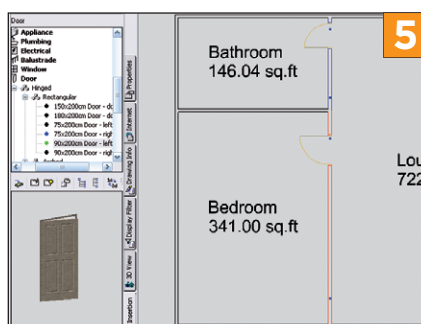
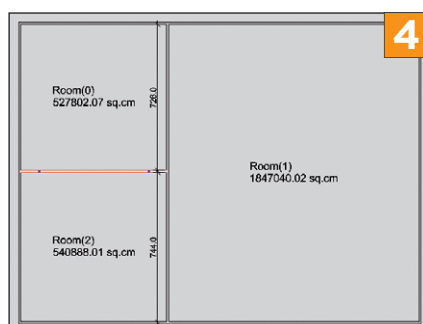
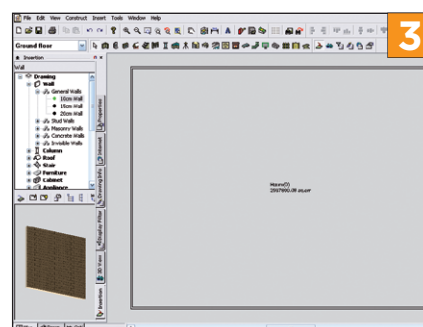
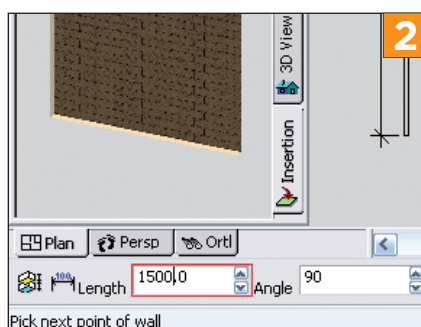
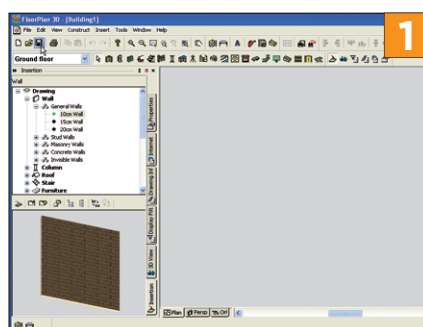
2 Click on the Wall icon in the toolbar at the top of the workspace. The various types of wall will appear in the Insertion panel on the left. Click in the bottom left of the workspace to start drawing the wall. As you move the onscreen cursor, you'll see the length of the wall displayed onscreen so that you can quickly draw it out to roughly the right length. If you need a little more precision, use the Tab key on your keyboard to insert accurate measurements into the Length box in the lower-left corner of the screen. Hit the Tab key again and you can enter an angle for the direction of the wall, too.

3 Once you've finished drawing that first segment of the wall, another click of the mouse will complete it. Repeat the process for the next three walls and the program will automatically draw all four walls linked together to create a single large room. It also calculates the size of the room for you. By default, all measurements are in centimetres, but you can alter this to feet or inches if you prefer, or simply turn off the display of measurements altogether. Select Tools, Options. You can change measurements on the Environment tab.

So far, all we've done is build the four outer walls of our apartment. The next step is to add the interior walls so we can divide the apartment into rooms, and then we'll move on to furnish each room individually.

4 There are several different types of wall listed in the left-hand panel. This enables you to include information such as the cost of materials, so you can calculate how much it will cost to build a partition wall between bedrooms, for example. For now, though, we'll stick with a basic general wall for the outside and inside.

Draw the internal walls you need to mark out the living room, bedroom and bathroom areas in our little flat, as shown in the screenshot for this step below. The FloorPlan program is intelligent enough to recognise when walls intersect each other and will automatically tidy up the drawing for you to show three neatly divided rooms. It also shows updated area information for each of



the new rooms. This is handy for calculating such things as the amount of carpet you might need.

5 Let's do a little tidying up. The bathroom is too big, so we can use the Select tool to click on the bathroom wall and nudge it into place. Click on the Select tool icon – it's the first on the top toolbar and looks like a white arrow. Then click the wall you want to move; it will turn red and the cursor will become a four-headed arrow. Next, double-click on the text label for each room and edit the labels so that each room is correctly named Bedroom, Bathroom and Lounge. We've added some doors too, using the Door icon from the main toolbar.

When you click on the Door icon, different types of doors are listed in the left-hand panel, such as doors that swing to the left or right. You can also see a 3D preview of each door design in the panel below. All the design work has been in 2D so far, but this is a good time to take our first step into three dimensions.

6 There's a row of tabs running down the left-hand edge of the floorplan workspace. Click on the 3D View tab. There are two different 3D options available. By default the program switches initially into orthogonal mode, which allows you to view your design from a number of fixed perspectives. You can alter the perspective by clicking on the little group of arrows towards the upper part of the left-hand panel. The other controls in this panel allow you to zoom in and out, or to adjust the height from which you look down on the scene. If you muck things up here, simply press the Reset button in the left-hand panel to return to this default view. You can also continue to select and edit items on the floorplan, such as the wall highlighted in red in the screenshot (below left).

7 The orthogonal view is a bit restrictive. Switch into Perspective mode by clicking on the Persp tab below the workspace. This mode gives you more freedom to move through the building you've designed so you can get a

feel for how each room will look. Use the arrow keys on your keyboard to navigate and walk through the scene. Alternatively, to move quickly around the entire building, click on the little camera in the left-hand panel.

The 3D mode is good for getting an idea of how your final design will look, but it's not so good for design work. Click on the Plan tab to switch back to 2D mode once more.

8 Now it's time to work on the individual rooms. Click on the Furniture icon in the main toolbar (this looks like a little table with a chair). When you do this the cursor turns into a rectangle, representing the item of furniture you're about to place in the room. If you look at the left-hand panel, you'll see that there are many different types of furniture available – tables, chairs, bedroom and bathroom furniture, and many others. Browse through this list until you find the items you need. You can also use the 3D preview panel to get an idea of how each item looks. Once you've selected the correct item, just click on the appropriate spot on the floorplan to drop it into place.

9 Our sofa is facing the wrong way, so double-click on it with the mouse and you can then move it or rotate it until it's in the correct position. While we're at it, we'll add a few other items of furniture. We'll have a table and some chairs, a little coffee table and a cabinet for the TV. This is probably a good time to click on the Windows icon and add some windows as well. FloorPlan has a huge range of furniture and other items built into it, so you can easily add outdoor features such as a landscaped garden, a garage or a driveway.

10 As well as providing graphical tools that you can use to design your dream home, FloorPlan also takes care of some of the more practical details. Double-click on any item that you've added to your floorplan, and a Properties dialog box appears. You can use this dialog box to modify the predefined items of furniture

built into the program, including information on the price and the supplier. If you use several items that are the same – such as six chairs for the dinner table – Floorplan will work out the total cost for you.

You can also modify the appearance of each item to make it look more realistic in the final design. Here, we've added a stained wood effect to a set of matching chairs for the dining table.

11 Let's switch back into Perspective mode and take a better look at our design. So far, so good – now you just need to continue placing furniture and other items into each room until you have transformed the entire place into your dream home.

It's generally best to do the main design work when you're working in the two-dimensional Plan mode, as this makes it very easy to adjust your design quickly and to add or remove items of furniture. Then you can just switch into 3D mode when you want to check on your progress, as shown in the screenshot below. Remember to save your project frequently so you don't lose any changes you make.

12 There are plenty of other features for ambitious designers to use. You might want to start by dropping a roof into place, or adding another storey. To add another level, click on the menu in the top left-hand corner, at the start of the third line of the toolbar. By default, it will say Ground Floor. Select Second Floor from the drop-down menu. To add additional levels to your building, go to Tools, Locations and click on Add.

FloorPlan can even venture outdoors. It includes options for adding outdoor plants and other features, such as a balcony or decking. You don't need a powerful PC to use the program, either. It can work with different levels of graphical detail, so owners of older PCs can turn down the detail to make the 3D graphics easier to cope with. Alternatively, a more powerful PC can add elements such as lamps and even daylight to create realistic lighting effects. 

